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CHEAP REPOSITORY. 21.

SUNDAY READING.

E L I
THE
HIGH PRIEST.

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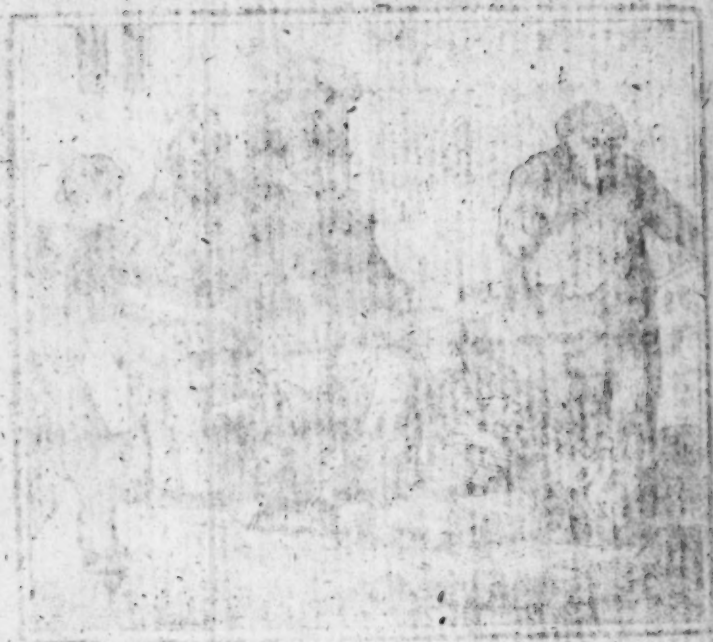
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E L I, &c.

NOW the sons of Eli were the sons of Belial, they knew not the Lord." Eli was the High-Priest, who daily ministered in the temple of the Jews, and offered sacrifice before the Lord; there is every reason to believe that he was a very good man, a faithful servant of God, nevertheless we are told that his sons were the sons of Belial, another name for the devil, "ye are the children of your father, the devil," says our Lord Jesus to the hypocritical Pharisees; that is to say, you partake of his pride, his hypocrisy, his hard and perverse nature; he it was who first introduced evil into the world, by the seduction of our first parents, and he is still constantly laying in wait to sink us deeper into his own dark principle. "We wrestle," says St. Paul, "with thrones and principalities," meaning with Satan and his host, who still retain dominion in this world, over such as voluntarily yield themselves to their slaves, or seek not from God and Christ power to resist the evil, which he is constantly stirring up in their corrupt nature. Every son of Adam must have within himself an emotion towards good and an emotion towards evil; God has left it in our power to encourage the one, and to repress the other: Happiness or misery is presented to our choice. The voice of God our Redeemer is continually

speaking in the inmost soul, and inviting us to turn into the principle of light which leads to life eternal. While on the other hand Satan, our enemy in the dark principle entices us to listen to his suggestions, that we may in the end become members of his diabolical kingdom, our sinful, corrupt inclinations but too often presenting him with easy opportunity to work our undoing; an instance of which we shall find in Eli's two sons. The Scripture tells us that a certain portion of the sacrifice which the people upon different occasions offered to the Lord, was allotted to the High-Priest and his sons; Hophni and Phinehas, for so the sons of Eli were called; instead of waiting till the sacrifice was offered, and being satisfied with the portion the Lord of Moses appointed them, sent their servant, whom we are told used to come in a very unseemly manner, before the sacrifice was offered, while it was boiling in the kettle, with a flesh-hook with three prongs, and strike it into the pot, taking away that it brought up for the priest; it is also added that before the sacrificers burnt the fat, which was expressly ordered to be done by the law, the servants of Hophni and Phinehas, would say to the priest that offered, no doubt in a very arbitrary manner, "Give flesh to roast for the Priest, for he will not have boiled flesh but raw;" and if any man offered to expostulate saying, let the fat first be burnt, which as I have before said, was strictly enjoined by the law, he would say, give it me now, I will take it by force; wherefore, the Scripture tells us, the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord; for men abhorred the offering of the Lord. *Men abhorred the offering of the Lord* failed to inspire them with that awe and reverence

was wont to do; when they saw the irreverence with which it was treated by their priests they began to think lightly of the institution, perhaps they reasoned thus; if God can permit such ministers to serve him, if he can suffer them thus to violate his institution, it cannot be of the importance we suppose, nor can sin be so hateful in his sight. We may without damage omit the trespass and sin offerings, for if it is only to indulge the luxury of the priests, we may as well keep it for the support of our families. Such reasoning, though totally without any just ground to support it, is not uncommon among christians of the present day; too many are ready to excuse their own negligence, or impiety by recurring to the defects of their teachers: look at our minister, says one, he talks away finely in the pulpit, but he is not better than his neighbours out of it; I have seen him return home intoxicated with liquor, and I'm sure he loves money, and is as slow to do a charitable action, as the worst sinner of us all; where is the use of going to church to be taught by one, who is not any better, if so good as oneself; that there are many priests, who like Phenehas and Hophni, profess religion merely with a view to the temporal advantages it brings them, who scoff at ordinances at which they publicly assist, who from the pulpit enlarge on meekness, temperance, charity, while pride, licentiousness and contempt of God's word, is conspicuous in every action of their lives, is a melancholy truth: but on the other hand it must be observed, that many of us are too much inclined to watch with fastidious malignity the failings of our fellow-beings, more especially of those who are placed in authority over us, either in temporal

or spiritual matters; we take an ill-natured pleasure in pointing out their defects, and are more forward to magnify, than to throw over them the veil of christian charity and forbearance; on these occasions we seem to forget that our teachers are but men, subject to the same passions and frailties as ourselves and, perhaps, expect from them a greater degree of perfection than their nature is capable of: the reply will I am aware be, since they know better they certainly ought to act better than we: to this I answer, that very few of us act wrong from the want of knowing how to act right, conscience, we turn not a deaf ear to it, is continually warning us from the evil way; and in a country like this where instruction is daily offered in various shapes to those who can read in the Scriptures, and from many excellent books, few we may suppose can err from want of knowledge; alas, we too often sin against our own conviction! It is not meant by what is here said, to vindicate or to excuse such preachers, as by their vices bring disgrace upon the blessed religion they profess, they will undoubtedly meet their punishment from the Lord to whom we ought as christians to remit it, even cautious of judging lest we be judged. Besides, it is not our business to investigate the conduct of our pastor while he is addressing us from the pulpit; the instruction he offers is that alone that should employ our thoughts; if it be good it is our interest to profit by it, whether delivered from the mouth of a true disciple of Christ or not.

The Almighty frequently makes use of bad people as instruments to bring about good, he employed the heathen nations to punish the disobedient

presence of the Israelites, and recal them to a sense of their duty and dependence on him.

Besides the sin which the sons of Eli committed at the sacrifice, were are told that they led very profligate abandoned lives. Eli was at this time very old, he heard all that his sons did, and was no doubt afflicted beyond measure, for what trouble can exceed that of a pious upright parent, who discovers that his children are lost to all sense of moral, or religious duty. When the good old man heard of their evil doings, he remonstrated with them, and said unto them, "Why do ye such things? I hear of your evil doings by all the people, nay, my sons, for it is no good report I hear of you, ye make the Lord's people to transgress, if one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him, but if a man sin against the Lord who shall intreat for him?" The sons of Eli paid no attention to this mild expostulation, which was, no doubt, more than once repeated, they went on in their old courses; habits of sin had probably got such hold on them that they had not resolution to break through them, or perhaps they thought as the Lord had borne with them so long, they were secure from his judgments, this is the case with too many of us. At length we are told a man of God, in other words, a prophet, came to Eli, and said unto him, thus saith the Lord; "Did I plainly appear to the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house? and did I chuse him out of all the tribes of Israel, to be my priest, to offer upon my altar incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel?"

Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice, and at my offerings that I have commanded in my habitation, and honoured thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel, my people? Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed, that thy house, and the house of thy father should walk before me forever, but now the Lord saith, be it far from me for they that honour me, I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, and there shall not be an old man in thy house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth that God shall give Isaac, and there shall not be an old man in thy house for ever; and this shall be a sign unto thee that shall come upon thy two sons Hophni and Phinehas, in one day they shall both die. And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart, and in my mind, and I will build him a sure house, and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever. Such were the words of the man of God.

The prophet Samuel, then a child, at this time ministered unto the Lord before Eli, him the Lord called shortly after in a vision, and said unto him, "Behold I will do a thing in Israel at which the ears of every one shall tingle; in that day I will perform against Eli all things that I have spoken against his house, when I begin I will also make an end: for I have told him that I will judge his house for ever, for the iniquity that he knoweth, because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. Therefore I have sworn

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iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with
 sacrifice nor offerings for ever." When Samuel
 told this vision to Eli, he said, leaving us thereby
 striking example of pious resignation, "It is the
 Lord let him do what seemeth him good." Fatally
 indeed was this denunciation performed against
 Eli, a battle ensued between the Israelites and the
 Philistines, in which the former were routed and
 four thousand men slain. We read in the xvth
 chapter of Exodus, that when Moses went up into
 Mount Sinai, whence he received from God the
 ten Commandments, the Lord ordered him to
 make an ark, according to certain directions he
 gave him, and which may be seen at large in the same
 chapter, after which he said to Moses, "There
 will I meet thee, and I will commune with thee
 from above the mercy-seat, that is between the
 cherubim, which are upon the ark of the testimony,
 all things which I will give thee in command-
 ment unto the children of Israel." Now when the
 Israelites had fled before the Philistines and were
 returned to the camp, the elders of Israel pro-
 posed that this ark of the covenant should be
 fetched from Shiloh, where it was kept, into the
 camp, foolishly, if not impiously imagining that it
 would save them from the power of the Philistines,
 while the hand of the Lord was against them. The
 ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts was ac-
 cordingly brought, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni
 and Phinehas were with it. When the Philistines
 heard the shout which was raised among the
 Israelites upon the arrival of the ark, they said
 among themselves, what means this shout in the
 camp of the Hebrews? And when they understood

that the ark of the covenant was come into the camp, they said, " Woe unto us, who shall deliver us out of the hands of these mighty gods? These are the gods which smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. With such a full conviction of the power of the God of the Hebrews is it not astonishing that the Philistines did not immediately abandon their idolatrous worship and become servants of the living God? but their confidence in themselves appears to have been strong notwithstanding the panic with which the news of the ark's arrival in the camp struck them: for the chiefs said, " Be strong and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants to the Hebrews, as they have been to you, quit yourselves like men and fight." God, however, at that time did not think fit to humble their presumption but rather made them an instrument of punishment to the Jews; for we learn that the Philistines fought and that Israel were smitten, that they fled every man to his tent, and that the slaughter was very great, so great, that there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot-men, but what contributed more than all the rest to dismay the Hebrews, was that the ark of the covenant was taken, by which they must have plainly seen that the Lord had withdrawn from them his protection. Foolish men! they depended on the ark, which the Lord had appointed only as a medium of communication with them without considering that it could avail nothing when they had, by their sins, provoked their God to withdraw from them his holy presence. In the battle the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phineas were slain; by their death accomplishing the purpose

shely, "Thy two sons shall both die in one day."
 When this afflictive news was brought into the city,
 Eli, the venerable priest, was sitting, we are told,
 by the way-side, anxiously watching, not it appears
 so much for the fate of his two sons, as for that
 of the ark of God, for which it is said his heart
 trembled. He no doubt felt that the ark should
 not have been removed into the camp without first
 asking counsel of God, but could not resist the
 peremptory demands of the people and, perhaps,
 of his own sons. No wonder then if he trembled
 for the consequences, which the displeasure of God
 thus justly kindled would bring not only upon his
 own house but upon the nation in general. When
 the news of the defeat and of the taking of the ark
 reached the city, there was a cry of great mourn-
 ing and lamentation, which when Eli heard, he
 said, "What meaneth the noise of this tumult?"
 And a man of the tribe of Benjamin who was come
 from the camp, answered and said, "Israel is fled
 before the Philistines, there hath been a great
 slaughter among the people, thy two sons Hophni
 and Phinehas are dead, and the ark of God is
 taken. Eli bore the account of the defeat of the
 Israelites, nay, of the death of his two sons with
 fortitude and composure, but when mention was
 made of the ark of God, we are told that he fell
 from off his seat backward, by the side of the
 gate, where he was sitting, and his neck brake
 and he died; for the Scripture adds, he was an old
 man, and heavy. Such was the end of Eli the
 high priest, after he had judged Israel forty years,
 an end which presents a striking lesson to all those
 whom the Almighty has blessed with children: I

have told him, says the Lord, to Samuel, that *will judge, in other words, punish his house forever, because his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not.*

Here we find a signal judgment pronounced by God himself, against a parent for not exerting his authority to restrain the evil doings of his children. We see, that Eli had not omitted gentle remonstrances, but when he found these had no effect, he should have exercised his authority, both as a parent and a priest of God, to have restrained the impiety and licentiousness of his sons. Eli we may suppose had the weakness of too many parents, his fondness had probably rendered him blind to the vices of his sons, till they had gained too much strength to bear the curb of parental authority, or if in childhood he perceived the seeds of them, probably flattered himself that when they grew to years of maturity, they would themselves find the advantages of virtue over vice, and voluntarily turn into the right way, this is the case of too many parents; but alas, habits of vice are much more easily acquired than abandoned, Solomon was aware of this, and, therefore, warns us, to "Train up a child in the way he should go," adding, "he will not depart from it when he is old." It is incumbent on all from the moment they become parents to reflect seriously on the important duty they have to fulfil, to reflect that a human being is committed to their care which it is in their power to fit, perhaps, for mansions of eternal bliss or misery, and to render a blessing or a curse to society and themselves: from the moment the child becomes capable of distinguishing right from

wrong, and this is much earlier than is generally supposed, the parent should with the most unremitting attention, observe the propensities that begin to show themselves in his infant mind; the good should be on every occasion encouraged, and the bad as carefully repressed. If the child discovers any tendency to cruelty, which is to be seen by their treatment of animals, the only objects within their little sphere, the parent should view this as the seed of a vice which will, if not timely rooted out, give birth at a maturer age to crimes of the blackest dye, and should therefore lose no time in applying the proper remedies; at first, gentle remonstrances, afterward correction; a tendency to covetousness and selfishness which will often shew itself in mere trifles, should not go unobserved nor uncorrected, as it often lays, I am convinced, a foundation for dishonest practices, and is particularly denounced against by our Lord Jesus Christ; a lie should never be passed over, when once the child is made sensible how heinous the crime is, a severe punishment should ever follow it.

We see by the fate of Eli, and indeed from many other passages of Scripture, that parents are answerable for the faults of their children, provided they do not at the age when the young plant is capable of being fashioned at will, used the means necessary to preserve it from future destruction: alas, did parents reflect upon this, and see how materially the welfare of their children is concerned, surely to save themselves the pain of correction, or to gratify a blind mistaken partiality, they would not become the bane both of themselves and their offspring.

It is a general and certainly a very just remark that an over-indulged child is seldom dutiful or affectionate to the unfortunate parent. This also should have weight, but, above all, the fear of offending that great and just King, who brought judgment on the house of Eli, *because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.*

THE END.



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